



Public Policy Document

**INTERETHNIC INTEGRATION
THROUGH INTEGRATED
HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION**



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FOREWORD

The publication is the result of the cooperation between youth civil society organizations and youth wings of political parties and is the product of two workshops on public policy making held in 2017 for the requirements of the organizations members of the Multiculturalism Platform within the project “Support of Democracy in Multiethnic Macedonia – Youth Activism for Multicultural Democracy” 2015-2017. The workshops and the documents were completed under the mentorship of d-r. Jasna Bačovska Nedic and d-r Aleksandar Spasov, a professor and a docent at the Iustinianus Primus Faculty of Law within the St. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje.

The Multiculturalism Platform was created in 2013 within the project “Support of Democracy in Multiethnic Macedonia – Dialogue and Cooperation” implemented by the Progress – Institute for Social Democracy and the Kalevi Sorsa Foundation from Finland. The Platform was established by the youth wings of political parties and civil society organizations, with the support of the Progress – Institute for Social Democracy and the Kalevi Sorsa Foundation.

The publication and recommendations of the authors, representatives of youth organizations and youth wings of political parties aim to initiate a broad debate and discussion on key issues concerning the life of young people in Macedonia and to introduce specific policies for improvement of the situation.

The Multiculturalism Platform is going to continue its work by proposing specific public policies and recommendations towards improving the situation with young people, as well as towards increasing the number of organizations and civil activists on a local and national level so as to become an active actor in the creation of public policies in Macedonia.

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Interethnic Integration through Integrated High School Education

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Introduction

In the past decade, a new trend is distinguishable in Macedonian schools, namely initiating teaching in an “ethnically pure” environment (students attending lectures in two different ethnically-based shifts). Negative ethnic stereotypes between the Macedonian and Albanian population have been growing, while the state¹ and other key actors, on the other hand, seem to have forgotten that interethnic integration involves inclusion, learning and supporting the cultures distinctive for the Roma, Turkish, Serbian, Bosniak and other ethnic communities in Macedonia.

With the constitutional and legislative changes after the signing of the 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement, Macedonia today is a multiethnic, multiconfessional and multicultural country. The political-legislative changes resulted with increased participation of the ethnic communities in the local and national administration. The amendments in the laws reflected on formal education as well, i.e. members of ethnic communities are now able to study in their respective native languages, with a significant progress being made in the decentralization

process, i.e. local self-government units now manage the schools. However, these political-legislative changes currently, 17 years after the Ohrid Framework Agreement was signed, fail to reflect the true values of the agreement in the daily life of citizens-members of the different ethnic communities. Ethnic citizens communicate mostly with members of their own community, resorting to contacts with members of other communities strictly when the circumstances dictate so (at work, when doing business, etc.). Unfortunately, friendship between different ethnicities is rare.² The apparent segregation permeating Macedonian society has effected the overall development of society.

Interventions towards improvement of interethnic relations in the country mostly occur in the educational system. School curricula provide the opportunity for learning the culture of “the other”. Most frequent instances are extracurricular activities, however, the fact that these are carried out separately, depending on the teaching language, is very concerning. Although state and local institutions, supported by the civil society sector, made significant investments in the education and encouraged

1 Beshka, P.B. et al (2009). Study on multiculturalism and multiethnic relations in education. UNICEF Office, Скопје (Бешка П.Б. и други (2009). Студија за мултикултурализам и меѓуетничките односи во образованието. Канцеларија на УНИЦЕФ, Скопје)

2 Karajkov, R. et al (2016). Assessment of multiculturalism on local level. Association for Democratic Initiatives, Gostivar (Карајков Р. и други (2016) Проценка на мултикултурализмот на локално ниво. Асоцијација за демократски иницијативи, Гостивар)

interethnic cooperation, the most common term used to describe the Macedonian educational system is “parallel”, meaning Macedonian and Albanian students are often separated and study in two different shifts, textbooks abound with stereotypes, while the faculty teaching the different native languages seem to have “forgotten” what collaboration signifies.³

Building a cohesive society resting on values of equality, in our context, involves investing capital in multiculturalism, particularly in the educational system and encouraging collaboration between students and teachers from different ethnicities. Developing capacities towards intercultural communication should not necessarily be directed solely at the students and teachers, rather the governing structures are those that should reflect the multicultural character of society.

This public policy document aims to locate alternative solutions towards increased integration among young people from different ethnic communities in the formal educational system, i.e. high school education. The paper refers to findings from different relevant research and an analysis of the draft-strategy for comprehensive education from a multiethnic integration aspect.

The paper in front of you was prepared by few young enthusiasts, aware of the challenges attributed to the interethnic coexistence among young people in Macedonian society, and particularly of the role education has in the individual’s development. Furthermore, we believe issues in education should be tackled more actively with proposals for suitable interventions towards implementation of the Comprehensive Education Strategy developed by the Ministry of Education and Science, aiming to improve interethnic relations among high school students. We recommend taking advantage of students’ creativity in extracurricular activities towards strengthening the capacities for intercultural communication and building a multicultural spirit among young people.

3 Bakiu, B., Dimitrovska, M & Brava, A. (2016). How to truly achieve integrated education in the Republic of Macedonia? Скопје: ЕПИ (Бакиу, Б., Димитровска, М., & Брава, А. (2016). Како до вистински интегрирано образованиево Република Македонија? Скопје: ЕПИ).

Contextual Problem Analysis

The Republic of Macedonia has always been a multicultural environment where people with different ethnicities coexist. The breakup of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia was accompanied by ethnic conflicts in all countries of the former Federation. And although Macedonia was an exception to this at the time, ethnic tensions emerged after the country gained its independence. The interethnic turbulences reached culmination with the 2001 military conflict, the result of which was the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, an agreement for internal regulation of the ethnic rights in the state.

High school students as a category are often susceptible to manipulation, and consequently involved in interethnic conflicts. The formal educational system offers interethnic integration curricula, however available data⁴ reveals that ethnic stereotypes are frequent among this group of individuals. This is a concerning fact since the lack of cooperation and familiarity among young people from different ethnicities impact the stability of the state and its socioeconomic development. A Euro-Atlantic integration requires integration of values such as coexistence and

tolerance if we want to meet the most important criteria for a full membership in the European family.

In the past, we have witnessed incidents in mixed ethnicity high schools where students were often harmed but the cases were never resolved. Most of the interethnic conflicts occur in Skopje and Struga, between Macedonians and Albanians, with occasional conflicts between Macedonians and Bosniaks, Macedonians and Roma or Albanians and Roma students.⁵

From 2013 to 2014, two conflicts occurred between Macedonians and Albanians in the Marie Curie Skolodowska High School in Skopje, who clashed with students from the Vlado Tasevski High School.⁶ The principal of the Marie Curie Skolodowska High School issued a statement explaining that high school students were still unable to conceive certain ideals and that this type of incidents should not happen. Male and female students were hurt in both incidents.

The incidents in Struga were of more severe proportions. In 2009, in the vicinity of the Ibrahim Temo High School second-year students clashed, using rods, baseball bats and other metal objects,

4 Beshka P.V. et al (2009) (Бешка П.В. и други (2009). Студија за мултикултурализам и меѓуетничките односи во образованието. Канцеларија на УНИЦЕФ, Скопје).

5 http://www.bbc.co.uk/macedonian/news/story/2009/02/090216_bilali_interview.shtml

6 <http://puls24.mk/makedonija/crna-hronika/momce-i-devojce-povredeni-vo-krvavata-tepacka-vo-aerodrom>

with the epilogue being three hospitalized students in the Struga General Hospital. The school principal, Musa Musai, condemned the incident, urging both sides to reconcile. The incident in question occurred between the students attending classes in Macedonian and students attending classes in Albanian language.⁷

A similar case occurred in the Zef Lush Marku High School, where a group of students got into a fight during which one person was stabbed with a knife in the head, with other visible injuries.⁸

Such incidents point to frequent interethnic conflicts in high schools, and it is high time to put an end to these practices. High school students should cooperate during and after classes, their safety being priority rather than conflicts leading to casualties.

The fact that our youngest citizens are easily susceptible to interethnic conflicts implies they are most easily manipulated towards conflicts where they are least expected, in school environment. And yet, in circumstances when coexistence is absent and merely declarative, it is difficult for young people to realize that they are the ones who hold the power to change things and are the future foundation on which this coexistence could be based.

A significant progress was noted in terms of promoting the right to education of the different ethnic communities, particularly by ensuring education in the students' native languages and the introduction of decentralization, which provided ethnic communities, through the local self-government units, with bigger control of schools. In the context of interethnic integration, a joint action is required on part of all concerned parties in schools, i.e. ministries, institutions, local self-government units, students, parents and communities.

7 <http://makfax.com.mk/makedonija/200996/>

8 <http://republika.mk/552368>

Causes and consequences

The lack of legal regulation of the interethnic coexistence and the 2001 military conflict resulted with a series of legislative changes in the country, starting with amendments to the Constitution and further with the Law on Local Self-Government Units, which created a framework for the involvement of other ethnic communities in the society.

Overview of past interethnic integration policies and the draft-strategy

Integration and progress in interethnic relations transpire in the educational system as well. Textbooks contents nowadays aim to familiarize students from different ethnicities, however, on the other hand, experts' assessments⁹ reveal that

⁹ Beshka P. V. et al (2009) (Бешка П.Б. и други (2009). Студија за мултикултурализам и меѓуетничките односи во образованието. Канцеларија на УНИЦЕФ, Скопје).

textbooks are also burdened with discriminatory contents and often place non-Macedonian communities in a disadvantageous position.

Ethnically mixed schools nowadays organize lectures in an ethnically pure environment, attending lectures in two shifts, which deprives students from the opportunity for interethnic cooperation. Unfortunately, school management, in addition to local self-government units and parents, support and allow such circumstances, failing to perceive interethnic cooperation advantages. Despite the experience in strengthening the teaching staff's capacities for encouraging interethnic cooperation among young people, we are yet to perceive visible results from their impact on the students.¹⁰

¹⁰ Karajkov R. et al. (2016) (Карајков Р. и други (2016) Проценка на мултикултурализмот на локално ниво. Асоцијација за демократски иницијативи, Гостивар).

Proposing Alternative Approaches towards Problem Resolution

Considering the current social context, it is our opinion that, in the short and the long-term, completely integrated education is impossible and unsustainable, and should be modified by incorporating several segments we believe to be of crucial importance for coexistence among young people from Macedonia.

The failure to assess the efficiency of the previous strategy for integrated education, or the qualitative and quantitative results of its implementation, prevent a comprehensive approach in planning activities towards decreasing ethnocentrism and intolerance among high school students in the educational system.

Several potential solutions regarding the ethnic disintegration among high school students surfaced in the past few years. Once such alternative was the decision reached by the Ministry of Education and Science to engage the services of commercial real-estate and individual security agencies in order to provide peace and order at schools. The expenses were covered from the local self-government units' budget, i.e. the municipality under whose jurisdiction the schools were. In our opinion such a solution is unacceptable, and, in fact, in reality resulted with increased segregation among high school students from different ethnicities. On the other hand, this alternative doesn't prevent further conflicts among students once the security agency stops securing the school or the possibility for such incidents outside school premises.

The plans for multicultural extracurricular activities were the second option. These, however, failed due to the irregular frequency and incomplete implementation in the educational process. High schools became reliant on projects stimulating quasi-cooperation between schools with different environments, instead of taking the initiative to create a culture of dialogue and mutual cooperation.

A third alternative, proposed by us, is the concept of modified integrated education with several components as its key elements:

- Interventions in the civil education, sociology, history and literature curricula by introducing contents which would allow students to become familiarized with one other's culture and traditions and remove the stigma and stereotypes;
- Discarding completely the physical segregation of high school students in settings where it is present, by combining the two different shifts, classes or in certain cases even the separate school buildings in one cohesive environment;
- Motivating and sensitizing the teaching staff on integration and interethnic tolerance and cooperation. This would involve development of a methodology towards training the faculty in the field of integrated education;
- Developing modules for optional subjects in the language spoken by at least 20% of the local population;
- More intensive cooperation among general as well as vocational high schools towards the development of extracurricular activities:
 - **Introducing debate as a learning tool** towards surpassing differences, a project activity with the potential to improve the structural dialogue among young people from different environments and result in critical thinking and affiliation with democratic values, tolerance and reconciliation;
 - **Organizing mandatory inter-municipal sport matches with mixed-ethnicity teams.** National sport matches between high schools are often attended by ethnically pure teams, which prevents other students to demonstrate their abilities and help the school achieve success. A bigger problem are cases where high school students refuse to play for mixed-ethnicity school teams. Organizing evens of this type would

be particularly important for improving the socializing among students from different nationalities.

- **Organizing manifestations and events** in which the program **would contain elements of the different nationalities the students belong to.** A greater effect could be achieved if the high schools students from one nationality performed a dance to a composition by a composer from the other students' nationality;
- **Joining journalist clubs, regardless of the students' religion or nationality,** whereupon students would be free to edit the assigned section in their native language and write articles in a common language for students from different nationalities on topics, images or events

relevant to their respective nationality, so that all students would be able to learn about these from the magazine;

- **Organizing school trips** during which students would have the opportunity to learn about the culture of people from different nationalities not living in their municipality. Such an example is the school trip of the high school students from Bogdanci to Tetovo or those from Arachinovo to Strumica, Shuto Orizari to Gevgeilja, Chucher Sandevo to Struga etc. However, any division in groups during transport in busses or vans should be avoided, i.e. students should not be allowed to group according to nationalities when being transported in order not to create an even bigger gap among them.

Conclusion

Regarding the insufficiencies of the first alternative, the idea to physically secure the schools, proposed by the Ministry of Education and Science, fails to guarantee prevention of further conflicts among high school students. Furthermore, the multicultural extra-curricular activities were not introduced in full in the educational process, resulting with seeming cooperation among schools from different settings. One of the consequences was the lack of self-initiative and enthusiasm to create a culture of dialogue. We believe that the third alternative allows students to gain knowledge about the different

cultures, reduces the physical segregation, removes stigma and, furthermore, increases interethnic tolerance. In addition, this would result with better communication, respect for other traditions, language and culture, as well as intercultural socializing.

The abovementioned suggestions and events are of significant importance when discussing better interethnic relations in our society. Seeing that the primary goal of our initiative is to strengthen the relations between interethnic groups, we expect it to be a huge progress and contribution towards creating better society for all. Integrated high school education is the key to creating a cohesive environment.

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